MIT Center for International Studies

Established in 1951, the Center for International Studies (CIS) is one of the premier organizations of its kind, a leading venue of global research and education. The relevance of the Center’s work for problem-solving on issues of security, international political economy and technology, Asian security, the Middle East and other areas is reflected in dozens of programs, projects, and the work of faculty and staff through research, public outreach, and publications. Its international education program for MIT students, the MIT Science & Technology Initiative (MISTI), is a pioneering effort that has helped bring the world to 3000 students through internships abroad and educational events on campus.

Richard J. Samuels, Ford International Professor of Political Science, has directed the Center for 18 years with the active participation of about 30 faculty and researchers, 40 staff, and 30 graduate students, along with numerous distinguished affiliated scholars and practitioners. CIS’s innovative exploration of international issues enriches MIT, the nation, and the world.

Leadership of the Center includes Professor Samuels, director; Dr. John Tirman, executive director; Chappell Lawson, Associate Professor of Political Science, director of MISTI; and Barry Posen, Ford International Professor of Political Science, director of the Security Studies Program.

Highlights of the academic year include:

- CIS hosted two Robert E. Wilhelm Fellows—Admiral Scott Swift (USN-ret.), former commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and Hala Al-Dosari, a Saudi activist focused on the place of women in the Arab world.
- A new program, Human Rights & Technology, was created and the first cohort of undergraduate fellows selected.
- M. Taylor Fravel, Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science, was named to succeed Professor Posen as director of the Security Studies Program (SSP).
- Professor Samuels and Principal Research Scientist Eric Heginbotham initiated a “Global Dynamics Simulation Lab” (GDSL) that will support a coherent research and teaching program aimed at assessing and anticipating international crises.
- Professor Posen received the "Lifetime Achievement Award for Innovative Approaches to Grand Strategy" from the University of Notre Dame’s International Security Center.
- Faculty engaged policy makers through the CIS Policy Lab, SSP’s congressional aides conference, and the annual briefing of Boston-based consuls general, among other ways, including frequent appearances in the national news media.
- The Center’s Starr Forum again reached tens of thousands of people with a rich assortment of speakers, including former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul and renowned climate scientist Michael Mann.

Security Studies Program

The Security Studies Program (SSP) is a graduate-level research and education program. Its senior research and teaching staff include social scientists and policy analysts. A special feature
of the program is the integration of technical and political analyses of national and international security problems. Security Studies is a recognized field of study in the Department of Political Science, where courses emphasize grand strategy, causes and prevention of conflict, military operations and technology, and defense policy.

**NATO Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations Seminar**

**Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series**
On October 25, 2018, SSP held its Ruina Nuclear Age Speaker Series with guest speaker David Holloway, the Raymond A. Spruance Professor of International History and Professor of Political Science at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. Holloway’s speech centered on the international history of nuclear weapons in which Holloway pinpointed specific instances of nuclear provocation and the future of these weapons in turbulent times.

**Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft Seminar Series**
On November 14, 2018, as part of SSP’s new Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft fellowship program, SSP hosted its seminar portion of this new partnership. In November, SSP brought Charles Kupchan, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and Professor of International Affairs in the Walsh School of Foreign Service and Department of Government at Georgetown University. Kupchan spoke on “The Illiberal Disruption: Temporary Detour or Historical Turning Point?” and where Western democracy is headed for decades to come.

**General Doolittle Award Dinner**
On Tuesday, March 12, 2019, the Security Studies Program hosted its annual James A Doolittle Award Dinner. This year’s featured speaker and Doolittle award recipient was Dr. Alan Epstein, Professor Emeritus, MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Dr. Epstein spoke on the “The Nonlinear Futures of Military Aviation,” where he shared his experience in industry, serving as a vice president with Pratt & Whitney with his time as a professor at MIT.

**Senior Congressional and Executive Branch Seminar**
On April 17-19, 2019, the Security Studies Program hosted its fifth biennial Senior Congressional and Executive Branch Staff Seminar, titled “Regions and Rivals: American Strategy In a Time of Uncertainty.” Bringing 25 staffers from across the legislative and executive branches to MIT’s campus for an intensive 3-day seminar, MIT faculty and outside speakers presented on nuclear and geographical threats affecting US interests across the globe. The seminar was a project of the Frankel Global Policy Fund.

**Special Seminars**

December 7, 2018
Daryl Press (Dartmouth College), “Nuclear Deterrence in an Age of Rapid Technological Change”
April 19, 2019
Scott Sagan (Stanford University) and Benjamin A. Valentino (Dartmouth College), “Public Support for the Use of Nuclear Weapons in the U.S., U.K., France, and Israel”

May 8, 2019
Steve Fetter (University of Maryland), Obama’s “Prague Agenda”: Success and Frustration

“Focus on Russia,” Seminar Series
November 1, 2018
Amb. William Hill, Former Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and Global Fellow, Wilson Center; “Russia's Place in the New World Order”

February 26, 2019
Brian Taylor, Professor and Chair of Political Science, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, “Putinism”

March 14, 2019
Amb. Michael McFaul, for U.S. Ambassador to Russia and Senior Fellow, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies; “From Cold War to Hot Peace”

Lincoln Laboratory Speaker Series
February 7, 2019
Jim Walsh, Senior Research Associate, SSP, “Readout from Riyadh: My Trip to Saudi Arabia” (Hint: Nuclear Power, Nuclear Weapons, and Iran, of course)

June 7, 2019
Kelly M. Greenhill (Tufts University), “Truthiness and Tribalism and Political Weapons: Fear, Cognitive Hacking and the Strategic Use and Abuse of Extra-factual Information”

May 3, 2019
Joshua Shifrinson (Boston University), “The Rise of China in Historical and Theoretical Perspective”

Wednesday Seminar Series
Sustaining a long tradition, SSP continued the Wednesday Seminar Series, 20 in total, which offers talks on topics relevant to national defense and international relations, including cyber security, China, Iraq, national security decision making, military technology, military history and nuclear topics. Speakers included academics, military officers, and think tank analysts. The speaker series is open to the entire MIT community and general public. (http://ssp.mit.edu/events/wednesday-seminars)

SSP publishes an annual report (http://ssp.mit.edu/about/annual-report), and a quarterly digital newsletter (http://sspearlywarning.mit.edu). In addition, members of the program made themselves available for numerous media appearances. Program research is built around the interests of the faculty, the dissertations of the graduate students, and occasional commissioned projects. Key research areas are:
Nuclear Strategy and Statecraft
- Examining the underlying logic of current nonproliferation strategies
- North Korea and Iran
- Resource allocation and counter-proliferation policy
- Middle Power Nuclear Strategies
- Nuclear History
- China’s nuclear strategy

Change and Stability in Asia
- Preventing conflict in Asia’s territorial and maritime disputes
- China’s military and grand strategy
- U.S.-China relations
- Japan in East Asian Security
- The India-Pakistan Competition

U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy
- Reassessing U.S. grand strategy
- The nature and limits of U.S. military power
- The future of conventional warfare

Internal Conflict
- Identity politics
- Political violence
- Civil war
- Counterinsurgency
- Post-conflict reconstruction

The program has a visiting fellows program in addition to the military fellows that rotate annually from all four U.S. armed services. The Stanton Foundation has awarded funds to support several scholars on nuclear issues, and a chair in political science. The program just completed its seventh year of the fellowship, which included two post-doctoral fellows, and one pre-doctoral fellow.

The Charles Koch Foundation is funding a new two-year joint SSP-Harvard Kennedy School fellowship. It supports research addressing fundamental issues of U.S. grand strategy, foreign policy, and America’s role in the world. SSP hosted one pre-doctoral fellow.

The program receives major support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which awarded SSP a 24-month, $670,000 grant (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2020) to support research on the global “Diffusion of Power.” It also received funding from the Stanton Foundation, and the Frankel (MIT) Global Policy Fund, among other foundations and donors, and in April 2019 received a one-year award from Lincoln Laboratory.

Seminar XXI: Outreach to the Washington, DC, Policy Community

For more than three decades, CIS has hosted Seminar XXI, an educational program for senior military officers, government officials, and executives in non-governmental organizations in the national security policy community. The program provides future leaders of that community with the analytic skills needed to understand other countries and foreign relations in general.
cohort of about 85 fellows meet throughout the academic year in Washington, DC, and northern Virginia.

Fellows learn to recognize the assumptions that underlie assessments of foreign societies and to explore policy issues critical to American interests through a variety of lenses. At each session, eminent speakers present alternative perspectives from which to understand a given country or problem. The fundamental criterion for choosing fellows is that they currently hold or are expected to hold top posts in the military or government within the next three to five years.

The program just completed its 33rd year and now has more than 2,400 alumni, including the current Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley. Robert Art, Christian A. Herter Professor of International Relations at Brandeis University and a senior fellow in SSP, directs Seminar XXI.

**MIT Science and Technology Initiative (MISTI)**

MISTI provides international education opportunities for MIT students and faculty through student internship, research, entrepreneurship, and teaching abroad programs; faculty funds; international events on campus; and partnerships with companies, research institutions, universities, and government agencies around the world.

MISTI operates via 25 country and regional programs. In addition to internships, through the Global Teaching Labs program, MIT students taught in 20 countries; MIT Global Startup Labs ran workshops in Germany, Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda; and the MISTI Global Seed Funds introduced new funds in Germany and Belgium, as well as in Korea and India through the Global Partnerships Fund.

*MISTI student programs*

MISTI offers MIT undergraduate and graduate students opportunities to intern, research, and teach abroad. These experiences are provided at no cost to the students. Students prepare for their placements through MIT courses in the language, history, and politics of the host country and a series of six to ten not-for-credit training modules developed by MISTI staff.

In 2018-2019, MISTI facilitated 1,215 international opportunities. Of these placements, about half were internships or research in companies, research institutions, or university laboratories.

The Global Teaching Labs program sent 298 students over IAP to Andorra, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Russia, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

In addition, 54 students taught STEM subjects and entrepreneurship during the summer through the China Educational Technology Initiative (CETI), Global Startup Labs (GSL), and Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow (MEET). The remaining placements were various opportunities made possible through MISTI.

MISTI student placements 2018-2019:

- 512 internships (companies, research institutions, NGOs, government, universities)
- 311 Global Teaching Labs and other short-term teaching
- 54 long-term teaching (CETI, GSL, MEET)
• 69 course abroad (for credit)
• 45 externships
• 7 graduate school/postdoc placements
• 93 short-term research
• 34 trainings facilitated or supported
• 90 workshops

**MISTI Global Seed Funds**

MISTI Global Seed Funds enables MIT faculty and research scientists to launch early-stage international projects and collaboration with colleagues abroad. Through an annual call for proposals, MISTI awards funds for international travel and meetings with international colleagues. Grantees are expected to involve MIT undergraduate and graduate students in their projects.

In 2018-2019, MISTI offered new funds in Germany and Belgium, as well as in Latin America, Korea, and India (Africa continued) through the Global Partnerships Fund, bringing the total number of funds available to 24. MISTI received 221 applications from faculty and research scientists and awarded nearly $2.1 million to 106 projects in 24 MIT departments.

**Training and on-campus events**

MISTI’s country programs offer dozens of pre-departure and public events on international topics in politics, culture, science, technology, history, industry, and the humanities for the MIT community. The trainings for the 2018-2019 academic year totaled over 140 hours. MISTI’s robust health and safety training was amplified with the creation of a new app to help students navigate both general and country-specific resources right from their phones. GSL rolled out a new training model for student instructors. These live trainings were also recorded and provided to students digitally with their curriculum materials.

**Program on Emerging Technologies**

The Program on Emerging Technologies (PoET) was founded as a joint venture of CIS, and the departments of Political Science, Science, Technology, and Society, and Engineering Systems with support from a National Science Foundation IGERT grant. Kenneth Oye, Professor of Political Science and Professor of Data, Systems, and Society, serves as director. Current activities focus on assessing and managing the benefits and risks of biological, medical, and information technologies. PoET research, education, and policy work is collaborative, with teams of technologists, scientists, social scientists, and policymakers working jointly on responsible innovation. In 2018-2019, PoET activities included:

• Developing and evaluating safeguards to limit potential security, safety and environmental effects of biological engineering applications including: (a) Gene drive control of
vector borne disease, with support from DARPA Safe Genes (with MIT Media Lab) and Fondation Brocher (with IRGC Lausanne); and (b) industrial chassis for materials production with support from Netherlands NWO and RIVM (with Wageningen University and Yale University).

- Initiating a study on “information hazards” associated with potentially dangerous tools and applications of biotechnology. Controls on information flows to malevolent actors also limit access to information by scientists seeking to advance knowledge, by benign technologists seeking to avoid inadvertently creating hazards, and by policy communities seeking knowledge to inform deliberation. This project focuses on improving tradeoffs across these desirable ends.

- Fostering responsible conduct directly, by providing leadership for the Broad Institute BioFoundry Safety Committee and iGEM Safety Committee.

- Conducting comparative research on planned adaptive management of risks associated with emerging technologies, pharmaceuticals, finance, and security affairs.

- Sponsoring, designing, and staffing the core MIT course on Science, Technology and Public Policy, serving undergraduate and graduate students from across the Institute.

Publications and reports stemming from PoET work included:


**The CIS Policy Lab**

The Policy Lab at the Center for International Studies is a resource for MIT faculty and senior research scientists who seek to inform public policy with their research. Specifically, the Policy Lab (a) identifies policy-relevant research, (b) works with faculty to articulate the policy implications of their work, (c) provides mentorship and staff support to create and implement outreach strategies with relevant policymakers, (d) provides coaching and communication training to make engagement effective, and (e) reimburses expenses that cannot be covered in a typical research grant.

The success of the CIS Policy Lab comes not just by synthesizing and translating research to “bridge the gap” between academics and policymakers. Instead, by arranging face-to-face
meetings and other events, the CIS Policy Lab builds long-term relationships and two-way dialogues to narrow the gap between the two communities. The overall goal is to bring MIT-generated knowledge to bear on pressing policy issues at all levels of government and to help researchers identify projects that will have a policy impact while also making a scholarly contribution.

In 2015, the CIS Policy Lab selected 8 projects for support, working with faculty members who were familiar with the policy community. The CIS Policy Lab has since conducted four Institute-wide Calls for Proposals, which produced 14, 22, 42, and 17 submissions respectively. In total, at the end of its fifth year, the CIS Policy Lab will have worked on 91 projects involving 55 principal investigators representing all five schools at MIT (see chart below).

Unlike a competitive grant program, the CIS Policy Lab seeks to support and add value to as many policy outreach efforts as possible. In each call for proposals, projects are divided into those that receive full support (unlimited staff assistance and fully reimbursing project expenses, up to $10,000) and partial support (limited staff assistance and, on average, reimbursements up to $3,000) The breakdown of partially and fully supported projects can be seen in the graph below.

This year the CIS Policy Lab began to expand its reach outside of MIT by developing a collaboration with Harvard Medical School’s Scientific Citizenship Initiative (SCI). To date SCI has provided financial support to cosponsor Policy Lab activities and has worked with the Policy Lab to submit a grant proposal to co-develop policy outreach projects.

In the last year, the CIS Policy Lab also received significant donations from two MIT alumnae as well as internal funding from the Center for International Studies, Vice President of Research, Office of Open Learning, and an individual faculty member’s account. External support came from two foundations and one professional society. The Center for International Studies and the Technology and Public Policy Program (TPP) have provided office space and administrative assistance.

Finally, in April 2018, the CIS Policy Lab launched an online course entitled “Tools for Academic Engagement in Public Policy.” This short course distills the past five years of Policy Lab experience into a series of videos that provide 1) an essential introduction to the policymaking process through the lens of the U.S. federal government, 2) specific steps researchers can take to engage policy stakeholders and 3) training to articulate the policy implications of their work.

**Persian Gulf Initiative**

This initiative, established in 2005, produces new knowledge about Gulf states and U.S. foreign policy. Several workshops employing “critical oral history” methods have yielded two books and several articles, among other activities. In this academic year, the work includes a third and culminating book on U.S.-Iran relations, and a highly innovative Web site that utilizes several hundred documents produced for the critical oral history conferences. The co-authors of the book, including the Initiative’s director, Principal Research Scientist John Tirman, presented findings at the University of Hamburg (Germany) conference on narratives in international relations in August.
Stemming from his work on the human costs of war, Dr. Tirman also advised a documentary project investigating civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Human Rights & Technology

This new program was created to take advantage of MIT's premier place as a technology educator. Combined with the need for human rights education and practice, the program is designed to enable students to devise an innovative project of their own that explores the relationship between human rights and technology. Both the positive relationship—where technology enhances the application of human rights norms—and the negative aspects of the relationship—where technology uses may spark human rights concerns—are considered.

The first cohort of MIT undergraduates brought six projects that were selected from an open, Institute-wide competition. They ranged from examining technological innovations in healthcare to discerning hate speech on the Internet. Dr. Tirman co-directs the program with Professor Anat Biletzki of Quinnipiac University. They began work during the academic year to convene a conference on the state of the field.

Seminar Series

Each year, the Center sponsors several seminar series that are scholarly and open to the public. SSP sponsors two series—its Wednesday seminar, and the Focus on Russia series. The Center's offerings include South Asia Politics, cosponsored with Harvard and Brown universities; Associate Professor of Political Science Vipin Narang is co-chair. The Myron Weiner Seminar, mounted by the Inter-University Committee on International Migration, which CIS hosts, is the other major offering; Justin Steil, Associate Professor of Law and Urban Planning, is co-chair. The late Professor Weiner, a renowned migration theorist, was director of CIS from 1987 to 1992. The Center also sponsors the Emile Bustani Seminar on the Middle East, a longtime effort headed by Associate Provost Philip Khoury. In addition, the Center sponsors working groups that are organized by graduate students.

South Asia Politics Seminar

- Francesca Jensenius (University of Oslo) September 7, 2018: “Constructing a majority: A micro-level study of voting patterns in Indian elections”
- Sonalde Desai (University of Maryland) October 19, 2018: “Does Rising Education Lead Changing Gender Norms in India?”
- Alyssa Ayres (Council on Foreign Relations) December 7, 2018: “India on the U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda”
- Bilal Baloch (Centre for the Advanced Study of India) February 8, 2019: “Crisis and Credibility: The Politics of Ideas in India and Developing Democracies”
- Gowri Vijayakumar (Brandeis University) March 1, 2019: “The Mobilizing State: HIV/AIDS and Sexual Identity in India”
- Sarah Khan (Yale MacMillan Center) April 12, 2019: “De Facto Suffrage: A Field Experiment to Improve Women's Turnout in Pakistan's General Elections”
Myron Weiner Migration Seminar


Emile Bustani Seminar on the Middle East

- Taner Akçam (Clark) October 23, 2019: “Erdoğan’s Second Republic (2018) compared to Ataturk’s First Republic (1923)”
- Bernard Avishai (Dartmouth) November 6, 2019: “Confederation: The Only Possible Two-State Solution for Israel and Palestine”
- Denis Sullivan (Northeastern University) February 12, 2019: “Worst Humanitarian Crises of Our Time: Displacement and Destruction in Syria and Yemen”
- Djavad Salehi-Isfahani (Virginia Tech) March 5th, 2019: “No country for young men (and women): Education, employment, and inequality in the Middle East & North Africa”

Working Groups

- Humanitarian and Disaster Relief
- Asian Security
- Global Sustainability
- Women in International Security
- Security Studies
- Chinese Politics Research
- Nuclear Politics
- Latin America

Public Programs

In 2018-2019, CIS offered a diverse and enriching public education program. The Center’s Starr Forums and public lectures continued to offer events on pressing global issues with leading academics, policymakers, and journalists.

The eleven events this past academic year were well attended by the MIT community and beyond, and the dialogues were spirited and informed.

Strong attendance and live webcasts provide for large audiences, and videos of the events are posted on the Center’s YouTube channel. Several forums are watched online by thousands of viewers.

When possible, the program involves like-minded organizations on campus and the local community, as well as local media outlets. Often our events are covered by the MIT news office and featured on their newsfeed.
This spring, the program supported an event organized by a MIT undergraduate student. The student, the first female Uyghur to attend MIT, spearheaded a conference on the Uyghur human rights crisis.

Provided below is a snapshot of this past year’s Starr Forum events:

“MIT-Harvard Conference on the Uyghur Human Rights Crisis” moderated by MIT undergraduate Zulkayda Mamat. Speakers were Sean R Roberts, George Washington University; Darren Bykle, University of Washington; Rian Thum, Loyola University New Orleans; Jessica Batke, ChinaFile; Gene A Bunin, Xinjiang Victims Database; Professor Joi Ito, MIT Media Lab.


“The Madhouse Effect,” with renowned climate scientist Michael Mann of Penn State.

“Abolish ICE?” featuring Juliette Kayyem, former homeland security official now at the Harvard Kennedy School. The program was moderated by Professor Lawson.

“NATO, the Balkans, and Ukraine: The Geopolitical Implications of the European Periphery?” featuring Neuffer Fellow Una Hajdari.


“The Rise of Populism,” with Associate Professor of History Sana Aiyer; Pippa Norris, Harvard Kennedy School; Aysen Candas, Bogazici University; and Elizabeth Leeds, Washington Office on Latin America and former CIS Executive Director.

“Citizenship under attack,” with Peter Spiro, Professor of Law, Temple University.

The CIS biannual newsletter, précis, a 30-plus page booklet on the Center’s research, was published electronically and in print. A new publication, the Starr Forum Report, was also offered in fall and spring both in print and electronically. Starr Forum Report and précis are circulated across the Institute, and to hundreds of like-minded research centers, NGOs, policymakers, and journalists.

In an effort to promote this large volume of work, Center staff manages the external web site; the intranet site, email newsletters for both external and internal communications; live-streaming of our public events via Facebook; provides ongoing media support through news releases, direct media promotion and outreach, and writing news features. CIS staff also produce video shorts promoting our scholars and is active on social media, including but not limited to Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

For more information, visit the Center's Web site at http://cis.mit.edu/